

# Happy Holidays? Cope with Stress, Tension

**I'm dreading the holidays. Something always happens and I usually become very upset. Is there anything I can do to de-stress and actually enjoy myself this year?**

First, you're not alone. The holiday "blues" often stem from the demands of the season — shopping (on a deadline, no less), parties, family obligations, housecleaning, decorating, houseguests — you name it, there's always something extra to sap your time and energy.

It's also often a time many people feel lonely or soberly self-reflective as the year draws to a close. Combine that with fatigue, financial stress, and disappointments stemming from unrealistic expectations, and you have a solid mix for stress, tension and even depression.

The National Mental Health Association and the Mayo Clinic offer tips for coping during the holidays. Among them are:

- **Be realistic about time and traditions.** Be sure to pace yourself during the holidays. Remember, you don't have to accept every invitation. Prioritize your activities, and make sure you have the time and energy to enjoy the ones that are most important to you. And be sure you don't get so caught up in yearning for the "good old days" that you can't enjoy today's festivities. Traditions change over time, no matter how enjoyable they once were. Try something new; you might find you like it.

- **Accept that it's OK to feel sad or lonely.** These are common feelings this time of year, especially if a loved one has recently died or



you've been through another stressful situation. If you feel this way, know that it's normal and that you don't have to force yourself to be happy just because it's the holidays.

- **Reach out to others.** If you're hosting the family gathering this year, get help for meal preparation and clean-up. If you feel alone and have few obligations on your time, try volunteering at a local church or organization. Reaching out to family and friends; contacting someone you haven't heard from for awhile; and getting involved in larger causes can get you the support and companionship you may be looking for.

- **Keep up healthy habits.** Holidays shouldn't be your excuse to overindulge on sweets, snacks or alcohol. Some indulgence is OK, but going overboard can lead to additional stress, guilt, and, in the case of alcohol, depression. Be sure to build in time for both physical activity and sleep.

For additional guidance, see Ohio State University Extension's "Marriage Matters" online newsletter at <http://hec.osu.edu/family-life/marriagematters/>; click on "Surviving the Holidays." More coping strategies are available at the Mayo Clinic's Web site at <http://mayoclinic.com> and the Mental Health Association's site at <http://www.nmha.org>. Search for "holiday depression."

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues especially regarding finances and relationships. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



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**For the month of  
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**Dear Subscriber:** Family Fundamentals is a new monthly column on family issues. This column, the fourth in the series, was reviewed by Ted Futris, Ohio State University Extension family life specialist and assistant professor of human development and family science in the College of Human Ecology.

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